

April 11, 2005

Dear Friend:

With spring well on its way, Congress renewed its work last week. There is no shortage of important legislation waiting for action, and the next two months will see several important measures come before the House and Senate.

Unfortunately, much of the legislation we will be considering, along with the business that has been conducted thus far, is taking place in a climate of deteriorating ethical standards and general disrespect for long-standing House operating procedures.

We have seen a dramatic increase in the number of restrictive rules of debate for legislation on the floor, thereby severely limiting the number of substantive amendments. Several times we have seen votes held open long past the allotted time in order to coerce members into changing their votes on controversial measures, thereby changing the outcome of a bill's passage. The most egregious example is the vote on the Medicare bill during the 108th Congress, which was held open for nearly three hours – a record. The Majority also has consistently denied access to members of the Minority party from participating in conference committees, which are the committees that negotiate differences between versions of similar legislation passed by the House and Senate.

All of these tactics have severely damaged the democratic process in the House and tied the hands of Members. The process must be opened up to allow more debate on the pressing issues of the day. In fact, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich advised the House leadership to "open up the rules more." There also have been several cases of votes taken before members have even had sufficient time to sift through legislation to determine what is in it.

The now infamous PATRIOT Act is one of the most serious examples of the Majority rushing legislation through the House, but it is hardly the only example. The democratic process in the House is suffering, and the Majority will cease their heavy-handed, anti-democratic tactics only if the American people demand it. As an editorial from the Washington Post stated, "An occasional illness has become a chronic disease. Tactics once considered egregious have become ordinary."

The House Rules Committee Ranking Member Louise Slaughter (NY) recently released a report about the erosion of the democratic process. This report details the dramatic effects we have seen in the House and I encourage you to read it. Please [click here](#) for more information.

Sincerely,

Tom Udall  
Member of Congress